

AMERICAN DIPPER *CINCLUS MEXICANUS* IN VENEZUELA

Three species in the genus *Cinclus* occur in the Americas: the Rufous-throated Dipper *C. schulzi* in northwestern Argentina and adjacent Bolivia, the White-capped Dipper *C. leucocephalus* in Bolivia, Peru, Colombia and northwestern Venezuela; and the American Dipper *C. mexicanus* from Alaska to western Panama (Ridgely & Tudor 1989, Sibley & Monroe, 1991). (The record of an American Dipper on the river Cana in Darien, eastern Panama, is not now accepted; R. S. Ridgely *in litt.*)

In 1992 and 1994 an expedition of the Moravian Museum visited some parts of Venezuela. Among the places visited was the montane rainforest of San Esteban in Carabobo State. Despite the fact that this locality is situated in a densely populated area along the coast northwest of Caracas it is, owing to its difficult access, the steep mountain slopes, and the nature protection policy, surprisingly fresh and well preserved. The expedition found shelter in an abandoned cottage on the slope of a valley about 4 km above the village of San Esteban near the port of Puerto Cabello. This cottage is surrounded by a former cocoa and banana plantation which is being rapidly overgrown by the surrounding forest. The San Esteban stream runs down the valley, with countless rapids and waterfalls, and the river-bed is strewn with boulders. Squeezed between the steep forested slopes are numerous pools with crystal-clear water.

Along this stream the members of our team regularly observed uniformly brownish-grey dippers, at elevations of about 500–900 m. Walking against the current of the stream is very difficult and, in some places, impossible without special equipment. The stream is, however, more or less followed by a path, which in places goes down to the water. Thus it was possible to climb up into the hills to a spot called by the local people 'the Spanish bridge' (the remains of a bridge from the times of Spanish colonisation). The dippers were observed along the entire 4–5 km long section of the stream, from our base at the cottage up to the ruins of the bridge. In March 1992 we repeatedly saw three birds, and in February 1994 four.

We are very familiar with the European Dipper *C. cinclus*; it is hardly possible to confuse it with any other bird. The birds that we saw at San Esteban were exactly the same in appearance and behaviour as their European counterparts, including their flight call. They bobbed in typical manner, perched on rocks in the stream, and when disturbed would fly low over the water to another rock. When we waded upstream (collecting different kinds of fish for subsequent check of parasitic contamination), a dipper would fly ahead of us in this way, for some distance, then suddenly turn round and fly back past us, presumably having reached the end of its territory. We did not, however, try to study their feeding behaviour, so cannot say anything about their swimming or walking underwater.

As far as we could tell, these birds agreed closely in plumage colour with the American Dipper, and we assume that they must have been of this species. But, being so isolated from the rest of the species (by c. 1600 km), they may well be subspecifically distinct.

Our expedition to Venezuela was made at the invitation of a non-governmental organization FUDECI, by its president the late Dr Francisco Carillo Batalla. We are grateful to Dr Robert S. Ridgely for commenting on an earlier draft of this paper.

## References:

- Ridgely, R. S. & Tudor, G. 1989. *The Birds of South America*. Vol. I. Oxford Univ. Press.  
Sibley, C. G. & Monroe, B. C. Jr. 1991. *Distribution and Taxonomy of the Birds of the World*. Yale Univ. Press.

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### BOOK RECEIVED

Howell, Steve N. G. & Webb, Sophie 1995. *A Guide to the Birds of Mexico and Northern Central America*. Pp. xvi+851. 71 coloured plates, 44 text-figures, maps. Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-854013-2 (Hbk), 0-19-854012-4 (Pbk). £25.00 (Pbk). 23.5 × 16 cm.

This impressive book, by authors (Sophie Webb also the artist) who have published many of their original findings in this *Bulletin*, deals with 1060 species and fills a major gap in the world coverage of birds in up-to-date guides. Between it and the Stiles & Skutch work on Costa Rica, only a fraction of Honduras and the greater part of Nicaragua remain uncovered. It follows a pattern that is now more or less standard for modern guides of this kind, with colour plates in a block in the middle and text for each species that deals in detail with identification (including voice), summarises habitat, and gives information on distribution by means of a map (surely the most accurate available for this part of the world) supplemented by abbreviated notes on status, abundance, movements and altitudinal range. The colour plates are generally excellent, 7 showing raptors in flight outstanding. As a guide to one of the ornithologically richest parts of the world, this book is unlikely to be superseded for a very long time.